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Rex Murphy: The UN climate-change panel that cried wolf too often

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Body

Everybody loves the Apocalypse. The idea of the end of the world, the more imminent the better, has always had enthusiastic popular support. For as long as we've enjoyed life on this delightful Earth there has been a morose and righteous sect of one sort or another telling us the lease was nearly up, the doomsday bailiff coming any minute now to shut things down forever. And whether from the abrasive thrill of the message, or the melodrama of the scenario, people have lapped it up.

Indeed there is a whole category of philosophy devoted to that time when the world in flame and fire renders itself into ash, when time stands still, life evaporates into eternity and all is dead and cold. It is impressively called eschatology - the study of The Four Last Things. Not, as might be facilely assumed, Feminism, Ecowarts, Don Lemon and WE Day, but the rather more appetizing quartet of Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. It is the four last things, not the four most annoying.

As an attention-getter, The End is Near is right up there with the fabled cry of "Fire" in a crowded theatre. Identical really, as claiming the world is about to end any moment now is the loudest possible cry of "Fire" in the largest possible theatre of all. The call does gather a crowd. Under the spell of lunatic prophets belching Armageddon, people have done the craziest things - crowded on mountain tops or gone off into the torrid desert - to await the end, only, of course, in the end (that never happens) to be disappointed.

Its enchantment never fades. However often it proves hollow, there is always another set ready to take it up. (It's like the Quebec referendum: if at first you don't secede, try, try again. Sorry.) Summoning the shadow of universal **doom** has advanced many a fretful cause, spawned numerous sects, and wrought tribulation and anxiety in the minds of men since ancient times.

A man in New York City holds a sign predicting the world would end on May 21, 2011.

Religious pretenders, in particular, have demonstrated a fondness for the imagery and idea of extinction and collapse and none quite so gluttonously as the modern sectarians of the environmental movement. They have been throwing out scares of population bombs, famine, extinction, wars, world floods, vast migrations and - the favourite - imminent and absolute global ecological collapse for decades now. It would take a master of the abacus to tot up how many "deadlines" and "last chances" and "tipping points" and "if-we-don't-act-NOW-it-will-be-too-lates" the world has been teased with, whether from Prince Charles on his private train, sundry ecological anchorites, or the pursed pious lips of the "we're-here-to-save-you, send-in-your-money-now" megacorp fundraising machines of Greenpeace, the Sierra Club and all their green ilk.

None however, have more versatility with the alarm bells of the apocalypse than the annual gatherings of the Gotterdammerung club, the Infinite Projectors of **Climate** Collapse, the assembly of existential dread known as the IPCC. For them, as Paris was for terse Hemingway, the end of the world is a moveable feast. For near three

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decades now they have held their annual jumbo jamborees. And every year the news is worse, the threats are greater, and it is always just a hair's breadth from being too late. The scene is always the same. A keening goes around the assembled multitude of worshippers as a fresh and even more definitive deadline than any of the past 20 or 30 for Saving the Planet as inscribed in The Book of *Climate* Revelations.

A sign reading "The end of the world is here" advertises a restaurant in Bugarath, a small village in the foothills of the Pyrenees that an ancient Mayan calendar predicted would be the only place to be saved from the apocalypse on Dec. 21, 2012.

The IPCC enjoys a delightfully recurrent state of despair over the world's imminent collapse, which happily coincides with the release of each annual report. This is not without some burden of paradox. Had the world come close to ending when and as many times as its green sages have foretold, there wouldn't be enough of it left to hold their next conference. An extinction event "devoutly to be wished."

Things are looking, unsurprisingly, down. 2100 used to be the final frontier. It's been moved up some 70 years to 2030. And we've lost half a degree. The new threshold is 1.5, where we used to have the full comforts of a whole two degrees. Other good news. No one is living up to their commitments. Even the most sanctimonious on the subject.

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists unveils the 2018 "Doomsday Clock" on Jan. 25, 2018, in Washington, D.C.

The greener-than-thou Canada of Mr. Trudeau and Ms. McKenna it has been noted is singing all the hymns in the right key and enjoys a friendly smile from the preacher, but \$10 a tonne, \$20 a tonne, even \$50 dollars a tonne won't cut it. And they know it. To be true to their own sermonizing, Mr. Trudeau and his Cabinet colleague would have to deal with the United Nations report that estimated governments would need to impose effective carbon prices of \$135 to \$5,500 per ton of carbon dioxide pollution by 2030(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/08/climate/carbon-tax-united-nations-report-nordhaus.html>) to keep overall global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

And Canadians will see that when grand pianos take wing and Donald Trump is invited for a few beers over a weekend at Harrington Lake to pick up a few tips about the best restaurants in Mumbai for his next trip to the subcontinent. The Liberal government's fabled plan, by the IPCC reckoning, is actually more of a ploy.

The trouble with apocalypses is that they can't be plural. You only get one by definition. Neither can you set multiple deadlines for Doomsday. It's a kind of one-off by nature. Do it too often and people cease to take notice or even care.

Everyone knows the sad story of Cassandra, the woman given the gift of true prophecy by the gods and simultaneously cursed to have no one believe her. The IPCC's problem, up to now, is like that but reversed. Always off, but generously credited. I think that string has run out. They can play Wagner and whistle the Ride of the Valkyries all they want from here on. People are tired of that music, and sick of the band.

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